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#BeMore Human

Leadership Lessons in the Work of Being Human

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James Moller

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Acknowledgements

To my grandparents — thank you for teaching me one of life's simplest and most profound lessons: leave things better than you found them. That quiet expectation became a compass for how I move through the world and how I choose to lead within it.

To my parents — your patience, generosity, and unwavering commitment to community showed me what it truly means to give more than you take. The values you lived, not preached, became the foundation of the leader I continue to grow into.

To the great teachers and mentors who saw something in me before I fully saw it myself — thank you for believing, encouraging, and challenging me. You taught me to aim high, to shoot for the stars, and to understand that even striking the moon is still a meaningful journey forward.

And finally, to the bad managers I encountered along the way — thank you for the unintentional education. Your chaos, confusion, and questionable decision-making offered a masterclass in exactly what not to do. In your own way, you became some of my most influential teachers.

To each of you — the steady, the inspiring, and the unintentionally instructive — this book carries pieces of what you taught me. I am grateful for every lesson, every nudge forward, and every reminder of what leadership should truly look like.

Author's Note

This book was born from years spent in rooms where leadership was tested, shaped, stretched, and redefined. It comes from conversations with people who were trying their best, from moments of uncertainty that demanded courage, and from the quiet realization that leadership is far more human than we often allow it to be.

I did not write these pages to offer perfection or prescribe a single way to lead. I wrote them to honour the leaders who show up every day — imperfect, learning, committed, and willing to grow. The ones who steady their teams in difficult moments. The ones who choose integrity when no one is watching. The ones who understand that leadership is not about authority, but about impact.

Throughout my career, I have seen how deeply people are affected by the presence, clarity, and humanity of those who lead them. I have also seen how quickly trust can erode when leadership becomes disconnected from its purpose. These experiences shaped the stories, reflections, and principles in this book.

If there is one message I hope stays with you, it is this:

Leadership is not something you earn once. Leadership is something you practice every day.

You will not always get it right. None of us do. But every moment offers a chance to begin again — to listen more deeply, to act with greater intention, to lead with more courage and compassion than you did the day before.

Thank you for choosing to lead with humanity. Thank you for choosing to keep becoming. And thank you for allowing these pages to be part of your journey.

— *James*

Contents

Acknowledgements.....7

Author's Note.....9

Before You Begin.....15

Introduction – Why Leadership Needs to Feel Human Again.....17

How to Use This Book.....23

Part I — The Human Experience of Leadership 25

Part II: Presence 27

Chapter 1 — The Pulse of Presence.....29

Chapter 2 — Navigating the Invisible Current**Error! Bookmark not defined.**

Chapter 3 —Leading Through the Lean.....**Error! Bookmark not defined.**

Chapter 4 — The Quiet Force of Availability.**Error! Bookmark not defined.**

Chapter 5 — The Currency of Connection ....**Error! Bookmark not defined.**

Chapter 6 — The Architect of Purpose.....**Error! Bookmark not defined.**

Chapter 7 — The Strength of the Second Seat**Error! Bookmark not defined.**

Chapter 8 — The Internal Compass.**Error! Bookmark not defined.**

Chapter 9 — The Lens of Clarity.....**Error! Bookmark not defined.**

Chapter 10 — The Sustainable Heart.....**Error! Bookmark not defined.**

Chapter 11 — The Pulse of Recognition .....**Error! Bookmark not defined.**

Chapter 12 — The Emotional Wake **Error! Bookmark not defined.**

Chapter 13 — The Weight of the Wheel..... **Error! Bookmark not defined.**

Chapter 14 — The Price of Silence... **Error! Bookmark not defined.**

Chapter 15 — The Architecture of the Margin..... **Error! Bookmark not defined.**

Chapter 16 — The Power of the Steady Hand **Error! Bookmark not defined.**

Chapter 17 — The Emotional Footprint..... **Error! Bookmark not defined.**

Chapter 18 — The Anchor in the Storm ..... **Error! Bookmark not defined.**

Chapter 19 — The Contagion of Calm ..... **Error! Bookmark not defined.**

Chapter 20— The Speed of Being Human..... **Error! Bookmark not defined.**

Chapter 21— The Responsibility of Rest..... **Error! Bookmark not defined.**

Part III: Humility..... Error! Bookmark not defined.

Chapter 22 — The Alchemy of Friction ..... **Error! Bookmark not defined.**

Chapter 23 — The Architecture of Ownership..... **Error! Bookmark not defined.**

Chapter 24 — The Invisible Thread. **Error! Bookmark not defined.**

Chapter 25 — The Behavioral Compass..... **Error! Bookmark not defined.**

Chapter 26 — The Operational Power of Voice ... **Error! Bookmark not defined.**

Chapter 27 — The Price of Abandonment.....**Error! Bookmark not defined.**

Chapter 28 — Trust: The Currency of Leadership **Error! Bookmark not defined.**

Chapter 29 — The Anatomy of Transition.....**Error! Bookmark not defined.**

Chapter 30 — The Heart and the Backbone...**Error! Bookmark not defined.**

Chapter 31 — The Price of Non-Decision .....**Error! Bookmark not defined.**

Chapter 32 — The Compassionate Contract..**Error! Bookmark not defined.**

Chapter 33 — The Courage to Go First.....**Error! Bookmark not defined.**

Chapter 34 — The Leadership of the Shadow **Error! Bookmark not defined.**

Chapter 35 — The Weight of Responsibility..**Error! Bookmark not defined.**

Chapter 36 — The Courage to Be Wrong.....**Error! Bookmark not defined.**

Chapter 37 — The Power of Multiplication...**Error! Bookmark not defined.**

Chapter 38 — The Custodian of the Culture .**Error! Bookmark not defined.**

Chapter 39 — The Friction of Progress.....**Error! Bookmark not defined.**

Chapter 40 — The Permission to Lead.....**Error! Bookmark not defined.**

Chapter 41 — The Weight of the Invisible Crown**Error! Bookmark not defined.**

Chapter 42— The Art of Stepping Back.....**Error! Bookmark not defined.**

Chapter 43 — The Landscape of Sorrow.....**Error! Bookmark not defined.**

Chapter 44 — The Quietest Whisper.....**Error! Bookmark not defined.**

Chapter 45 — The Bridge of Limits.**Error! Bookmark not defined.**

Chapter 46 — The Art of Release.....**Error! Bookmark not defined.**

Chapter 47 — The Foundation Beneath the Hole **Error! Bookmark not defined.**

Part IV: Intention ..... Error! Bookmark not defined.

Chapter 48 — The Invisible Architecture.....**Error! Bookmark not defined.**

Chapter 49 — The Heartbeat of Impact.....**Error! Bookmark not defined.**

Chapter 50 — The Ripple of Influence .....**Error! Bookmark not defined.**

Chapter 51 — The Living Thread....**Error! Bookmark not defined.**

Chapter 52 — The Quiet Bravery of Consistency. **Error! Bookmark not defined.**

Chapter 53 — The Infinite Journey of Becoming. **Error! Bookmark not defined.**

Chapter 54 — The Strategic Space ...**Error! Bookmark not defined.**

Chapter 55 — The Strategic Spark ...**Error! Bookmark not defined.**

Chapter 56 — The Unspoken Architecture of Fear**Error! Bookmark not defined.**

Chapter 57 — The Compliance Mirage .....**Error! Bookmark not defined.**

Chapter 58 — The Echo of Impact ..**Error! Bookmark not defined.**

Chapter 59 — The Power of "Yet" ...**Error! Bookmark not defined.**

Chapter 60 — The Homecoming.....**Error! Bookmark not defined.**

A Leader's Commitment.....**Error! Bookmark not defined.**

Epilogue - The Work That Continues .....**Error! Bookmark not defined.**

Continuing the Practice.....**Error! Bookmark not defined.**

Reader Reflection Journal .....**Error! Bookmark not defined.**

Before You Begin

This book is not written for perfect leaders.
It is written for thoughtful ones.

You will see yourself in some chapters and wish you had acted differently in others. That is not failure. That is awareness.

Leadership is not proven by never making mistakes. It is proven by what you do after you recognize them.

Read slowly. Reflect honestly.

The goal is not to admire good leadership.
The goal is to practice it.

You may recognize moments in these pages where you wish you had handled a conversation differently, responded with more patience, or noticed something you once overlooked. That is not regret — that is growth beginning. Leadership improves not when we deny past decisions, but when we learn from them and choose differently the next time the moment appears.

You do not need to change everything at once.
You only need to become slightly more intentional than you were yesterday.

Leadership is not a performance you perfect.
It is a practice you continue.

Begin there.

Introduction – Why Leadership Needs to Feel Human Again

Leadership is often framed as a set of competencies — strategic thinking, financial acumen, communication skills, and operational expertise. These matter, but they are not what people remember. They are not what inspires trust, loyalty, or commitment. They are not what shapes culture.

What people remember is how you made them feel.

Leadership succeeds or fails based on the human experience you create.

Over the course of my career — from small local governments to complex unionized environments to executive leadership roles — I have seen leaders rise or fall not because of their technical skill, but because of their humanity. The leaders who made the deepest impact were not the ones with the most impressive résumés. They were the ones who showed up with presence, humility, and intention.

These three qualities shape every human experience of leadership:

Presence determines whether people feel seen.
Humility determines whether people feel valued.
Intention determines whether people feel safe and aligned.

When these qualities are absent, leadership becomes transactional. When they are present, leadership becomes transformational.

This book is a guide to practicing the human experience of leadership in the moments that matter most. It offers sixty concise

lessons drawn from real experiences — successes, failures, and the quiet moments in between. Each lesson is designed to help you show up with more clarity, courage, and compassion.

Leadership is not a title. It is a daily practice.
And it begins with choosing to be more human.

The Quiet Shift We Rarely Name

Something has changed in the way people experience one another at work, and most leaders feel it long before they understand it.

Teams communicate more than ever before. Messages are constant. Calendars are full. Meetings overlap. Notifications rarely stop. By every measurable standard, we are connected continuously.

Yet many organizations are experiencing the same pattern:

more communication, less trust
more access, less openness
more coordination, less commitment

This is not a motivation problem.
It is not a generational problem.
And it is not primarily a technology problem.

It is a relational expectation problem.

For most of human history, relationships required effort. Conversation required time. Misunderstandings required repair. If tension existed, people addressed it because they shared space, responsibility, and consequence. Connection was imperfect, but it was mutual and necessary.

Today, people increasingly interact in environments designed to remove friction. Communication can be edited before it is sent. Difficult conversations can be shortened or avoided. Responses can be delayed without explanation. Interaction can occur without genuine encounter.

We now communicate constantly while relating less deeply.

Without intending to, we have begun carrying these expectations into the workplace.

People grow accustomed to:

- immediate response
- neutral tone
- predictable reactions
- low emotional cost
- minimal need for repair

When they encounter a real human leader, normal human behavior can feel personal.

A pause feels like avoidance.
A boundary feels like rejection.
Correction feels like hostility.
Uncertainty feels like incompetence.

The leader has not changed.

The relational standard has.

Many leaders respond by increasing communication volume — more emails, more meetings, more updates — hoping clarity will

restore trust. But trust is not created by frequency of contact. Trust is created by the experience of being understood.

We are entering a moment where leadership is not becoming less important, but more humanly demanding. Leaders are now working in environments that are highly connected but emotionally thin.

Leadership used to compete primarily with authority.
Today, it increasingly competes with systems.

Many leaders sense this shift but cannot quite name it. They feel leadership becoming harder even when their effort increases. This book helps explain why.

And systems are fast, consistent, and emotionally neutral.

Humans are not.

The work of leadership is no longer only to coordinate tasks or align strategy. It is to restore a sense of human regard in environments that unintentionally reduce people to interactions.

This is why leadership needs to feel human again.

Why This Matters

Across industries and sectors, organizations are facing a quiet but persistent challenge: engagement is harder to sustain, trust is slower to build, and burnout appears even in well-resourced environments.

Leaders often assume these are problems of workload, compensation, or structure. Those factors matter, but they are not the whole story.

People are not only responding to how much they work.
They are responding to how they are experienced.

Human beings are social learners. We understand our value partly through how others respond to us. When people feel seen, they contribute more. When they feel understood, they take healthy risks. When they feel safe, they grow. When they feel invisible, they disengage.

Modern workplaces unintentionally create conditions where individuals interact constantly but feel increasingly interchangeable. Processes improve. Communication accelerates. Coordination becomes efficient. Yet something essential can quietly thin — the sense that one's presence matters.

This is not a failure of organizations. It is a consequence of progress. As systems become more efficient, leaders must become more intentional about humanity.

Human-centered leadership is therefore not a soft alternative to performance. It is the foundation that makes performance sustainable.

Presence builds stability.
Humility builds trust.
Intention builds safety.

Together, they create environments where people contribute not only because they are instructed to, but because they are committed to.

Leadership will always involve strategy, accountability, and results. But those outcomes are carried through people, and people experience leadership before they evaluate it.

The sixty lessons in this book are not techniques to apply mechanically. They are practices to cultivate deliberately. Each chapter invites reflection, adjustment, and awareness of how small choices accumulate into large impact.

Leadership is experienced, not announced.

You will not always get it right. None of us do. But leadership offers daily opportunities to begin again — to listen more closely, act more thoughtfully, and lead with more courage and compassion than the day before.

The future will not demand less leadership.

It will demand more human leadership.

And that work begins with a simple decision:

to show up, with intention, as a person first and a leader second — and to understand that, in the end, those are never truly separate.

Leadership is not primarily remembered for what a leader decides.
It is remembered for how people experienced themselves in that leader's presence.

Many leadership choices feel urgent in the moment. Over time, however, their memory fades. What remains is the human impact left behind.

People may forget your decisions. They will never forget their experience of your leadership.

How to Use This Book

This book contains sixty short leadership lessons.
It is not designed to be rushed.

There are three useful ways to read it:

1. The Daily Practice

Read one chapter per day.
Over sixty days, you will begin noticing patterns in your reactions, communication, and decisions. Leadership changes most through consistency, not intensity.

2. The Situational Approach

Open the book when you face a challenge — a conflict, a difficult conversation, a decision, or a moment of uncertainty. Many leaders find the right chapter often appears at the right time.

3. The Reflective Method

After each chapter, pause and write a few notes about your own leadership. Reflection converts ideas into behavior.

This is not a book to finish.
It is a book to return to.

Part I — The Human Experience of Leadership

Leadership is often described in terms of strategy, systems, and outcomes. We talk about performance metrics, organizational charts, and the mechanics of decision-making. But when you strip away the titles and the structures, leadership comes down to something far more elemental: **the human experience you create for the people you lead.**

People don't remember your strategic plans. They remember how you made them feel in the moments that mattered.

They remember whether you listened. Whether you showed up with clarity or chaos. Whether you treated them with dignity. Whether you acted with intention or reacted out of fear. Whether you made their world bigger or smaller.

Leadership is not a role — it's a relationship. And relationships are built one human moment at a time.

After more than two decades working in HR and labour relations, I've seen leaders succeed or fail not because of their technical expertise, but because of the human experience they created. The leaders who earned trust, inspired commitment, and built resilient cultures all shared three qualities: **presence, humility, and intention.**

These qualities aren't personality traits. They're choices. They're practices. They're ways of showing up.

This book offers 60 concise lessons that help leaders embody these qualities in the moments that matter most. Each lesson is a doorway into a different aspect of the human experience of leadership — a small, practical shift that can transform how people experience you.

Leadership is not about being perfect. It's about being human — on purpose.

Part II: Presence

Presence is the foundation of the human experience of leadership. It's the ability to show up fully — not distracted, not defensive, not preoccupied with the next meeting or the next crisis. Presence is the gift of your attention, and it's the clearest signal of what you value.

When leaders are present, people feel seen. When leaders are absent — emotionally or mentally — people feel invisible.

Presence is not about slowing down; it's about choosing what matters. It's the discipline of noticing. The courage to pause. The willingness to listen without preparing your rebuttal. The ability to create space instead of filling it.

In this section, you'll explore the practices that help leaders cultivate presence: clarity, listening, boundaries, emotional regulation, and the ability to stay grounded in moments of pressure. These lessons will help you create a human experience defined by stability, trust, and connection.

Presence is where leadership begins.

Chapter 1 — The Pulse of Presence

Leadership isn't a role you manage, but a human experience you inhabit through the steadiness of your presence.

Leadership begins long before decisions are made or directions are set. It begins in quiet moments: how we listen, how we hold uncertainty, and how we respond when outcomes are unclear.

Most leaders do not set out to become distant or transactional. They become busy. Pressured. Overloaded. And slowly, without realizing it, leadership becomes something they manage rather than something they inhabit.

The heart of leadership is presence.

Not presence as performance — the kind measured by appearances or accolades — but presence as steadiness: the ability to remain grounded when others are uncertain and clear when others are overwhelmed. This kind of leadership does not demand attention; it earns trust.

In public service, the stakes are unique. Decisions ripple outward. Consequences are shared. Time horizons stretch beyond quarterly results. Policies, budgets, and strategies intersect with real people, real communities, and real impact. Every interaction matters — often in ways that are invisible until much later.

Yet most leadership development asks leaders to harden under pressure rather than deepen. To move faster rather than become clearer. To project confidence rather than cultivate understanding. The result? A workforce that feels led but not understood. A community that feels served but not connected.

Human-centered leadership asks something different.

It asks leaders to notice the space they create — or close — in every interaction. To recognize that tone, timing, and attention often matter more than expertise. To understand that leadership is experienced less through intent and more through consistency.

People rarely forget how leaders made them feel when it mattered most. They may forget the precise words said in a meeting, but they remember whether they were seen, heard, and valued. That emotional ledger is the true measure of leadership.

This is why presence is the foundation. Presence allows discernment. Presence allows compassion. Presence allows the courage to make difficult decisions while staying aligned with human values.

The heart of leadership also requires humility. To lead is to acknowledge that we do not have all the answers, that mistakes are inevitable, and that our influence is magnified — for better or worse — by the way we treat others. Humility is not weakness; it is the steadiness that allows learning, growth, and trust to flourish.

Finally, the heart of leadership demands reflection. To pause, to ask, "How am I showing up? What are the unseen consequences of my choices? Am I creating space for others to lead as well?" Reflection is the work that transforms management into true leadership.

Leadership is not a title or a role. It is a practice. It is experienced in small moments as much as in big decisions. And it begins — always — with awareness of the human impact of every choice we make.

This chapter will explore that awareness, showing how leaders can root themselves in presence, cultivate humility, and create environments where the human experience of leadership thrives. It is the foundation for everything that follows.

Leadership reflection:
What did people experience because of me today?